



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: January 25, 2007
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: Case D-1102: 16 Wendell Street ell
Case D-1103: 18 Wendell Street ell

Current Conditions

Applications to demolish the ells at 16 and 18 Wendell Street were received on January 9, 2007. The applicant, Lesley University, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for February 1.

The houses are located on the south side of Wendell Street on a combined institutional lot of 258,102 (the individual parcels being 156-61 and 156-29 measuring 4,750 and 5,567, respectively). The house and ell at 16 Wendell Street were built in 1862 and the house and ell at 18 Wendell Street were built in between 1853-56. The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district that allows apartment buildings and dormitories. The zone has a Floor Area Ratio limit of 0.75 and a height limit of 35 feet. The value of the land and buildings on these tax-exempt properties, according to the online assessor's database, are \$857,700 for #16 and \$1,062,400 for #18.

The houses share a consistent front set back of approximately 20 feet, as do other buildings on this side of the street. The condition of the buildings is excellent. The applicant proposes to demolish the ells and construct a new rear addition that would connect the two buildings and facilitate accessibility improvements. The new joined building would function as a residence hall. 16 Wendell Street is presently used for offices while 18 Wendell is already used as a dormitory. Architectural plans and elevations have been submitted with the application.

Description

16 Wendell:

The house at 16 Wendell Street is a 2½-story mansard building. The front door faces the street. The building is clad with wood clapboards and the roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The windows are wood 2-over-2 double-hung sash, with the exception of the smaller 1-over-1 windows in the front dormer. Trim includes corner boards, a wide entablature and cornice moldings, and

simple window hoods. There is a full front porch with a hip roof, and the front steps are constructed of granite. The 2-story ell is original to the house, except for an 11' x 12' addition that was added in 1899. The house had been sided with asphalt siding in the 1940 and the porch altered, but the siding has since been removed and the clapboards and trim restored.



18 (far left) and 16 (center) Wendell Street, January 25, 2007

18 Wendell:

The house at 18 Wendell Street is a 2-story Italianate building with a low hip roof. The front door faces the street. The building is clad with wood clapboards and the roof is covered with fiberglass shingles. The windows are wood 2-over-2 double-hung sash, with the exception of two 6-over-6 windows on the second floor of the facade, which I suspect were recent replacements. There is a full front porch with an oversized 2-over-2 window, square posts with chamfered corners, and brackets. The front steps are constructed of wood. The house had wide overhanging eaves with large brackets. The 2-story ell is original to the house and also has very wide eaves. Alterations have included the addition of an 11' x 3' bay window and a 1-story 3' x 7' addition in 1905 and 1906.

History

The Agassiz neighborhood consisted of several farms and estates that were subdivided and developed for middle class housing in the mid nineteenth century. James Hayward, a surveyor, laid out Oxford Street in 1847 in the course of developing a subdivision of the Wendell estate. Oxford Street originally ended at Wendell Street, but was extended north by several successive developers until it reached Beacon Street about 1858. The establishment of passenger service at Porter Square in 1842, the operation of the Harvard Branch Railroad from 1849 to 1855, and the beginning of horsecar service on Massachusetts Avenue in 1856 all encouraged development of the area, which became known as Agassiz after the first public school of that name was built in 1874. The blocks between Massachusetts Avenue and Oxford Street filled up fairly quickly, while the back

fields along the Somerville line developed only after streetcar service began on Beacon Street in 1882.

Katherine Brattle Wendell, the daughter of the Tory General William Brattle, moved with her daughters in 1794 into a large mansion near this site. The Wendell estate encompassed the area between Wendell and Everett streets and from Massachusetts Avenue to Oxford Street. Her granddaughter, Catherine Saltonstall Mellen Frisbie, married James Hayward, a civil engineer and a former professor of mathematics, in 1828. They bought out the other Wendell heirs between 1836 and 1841, and acquired two acres of the Divinity School lot from Harvard in 1843 to link the properties. He sold half of the latter parcel to his Kirkland Street neighbor, William G. Stearns, and the two men laid out the first few hundred feet of Oxford Street along their common property line. Hayward thus created the framework for the successful development of the Wendell farm. Early in 1847, he razed Madame Wendell's house, laid out Wendell and Mellen streets, renamed the old lane to the Pine Swamp as Everett Street (after Harvard President Edward Everett, who once owned the fields at the end of the street), extended Oxford Street across the Jarvis farm, and divided the Wendell place into six large lots for others to subdivide. Boston promoters Gardiner Greene Hubbard, Peter Oliver, and George Derby purchased the entire property, and in July 1847 filed a subdivision plan with 57 house lots on the streets laid out by Hayward. Many of the houses put up in the 1850s were built on speculation or as rentals. Development in the neighborhood picked up after the Civil War.

18 Wendell Street was built between 1853 and 1856 by either James H. Prince or James B. Tamplin, and it was among the earliest buildings in the Hubbard, Oliver, and Derby subdivision. Tamplin, a carriage dealer turned real estate promoter, built the very similar looking building at 20 Wendell Street in 1856. A stable was built at the back of the lot in 1888. By 1896, the house needed to be "raised and repaired," according to building permit records. The inherent ground water issues in this neighborhood may have contributed to this problem. Two small additions were added in 1905 and 1906.

16 Wendell Street was built in 1862 for Royal Richardson, probably by Adam S. Cottrell, who was a carpenter and secretary of the Harvard Branch railroad as well as being the grantor of the property to Richardson that same year. The property later passed to Anna M. Walker, Frank B. Shaw, and Bertha Johnson. Shaw added an 11' x 12' addition at the rear of the ell in 1899. The mansard roof is oddly proportioned, but documentation of it being a later alteration was not found.

Edith Lesley, later principal of the city's Houghton School, founded Lesley College in 1909 as a kindergarten teachers' training institute. Instruction was first offered in Miss Lesley's home at 29 Everett Street, and the college grew by acquiring more houses on Everett, Mellen, Wendell, and Oxford streets. The program was lengthened to four years in 1944, and a graduate program in education opened in 1953.

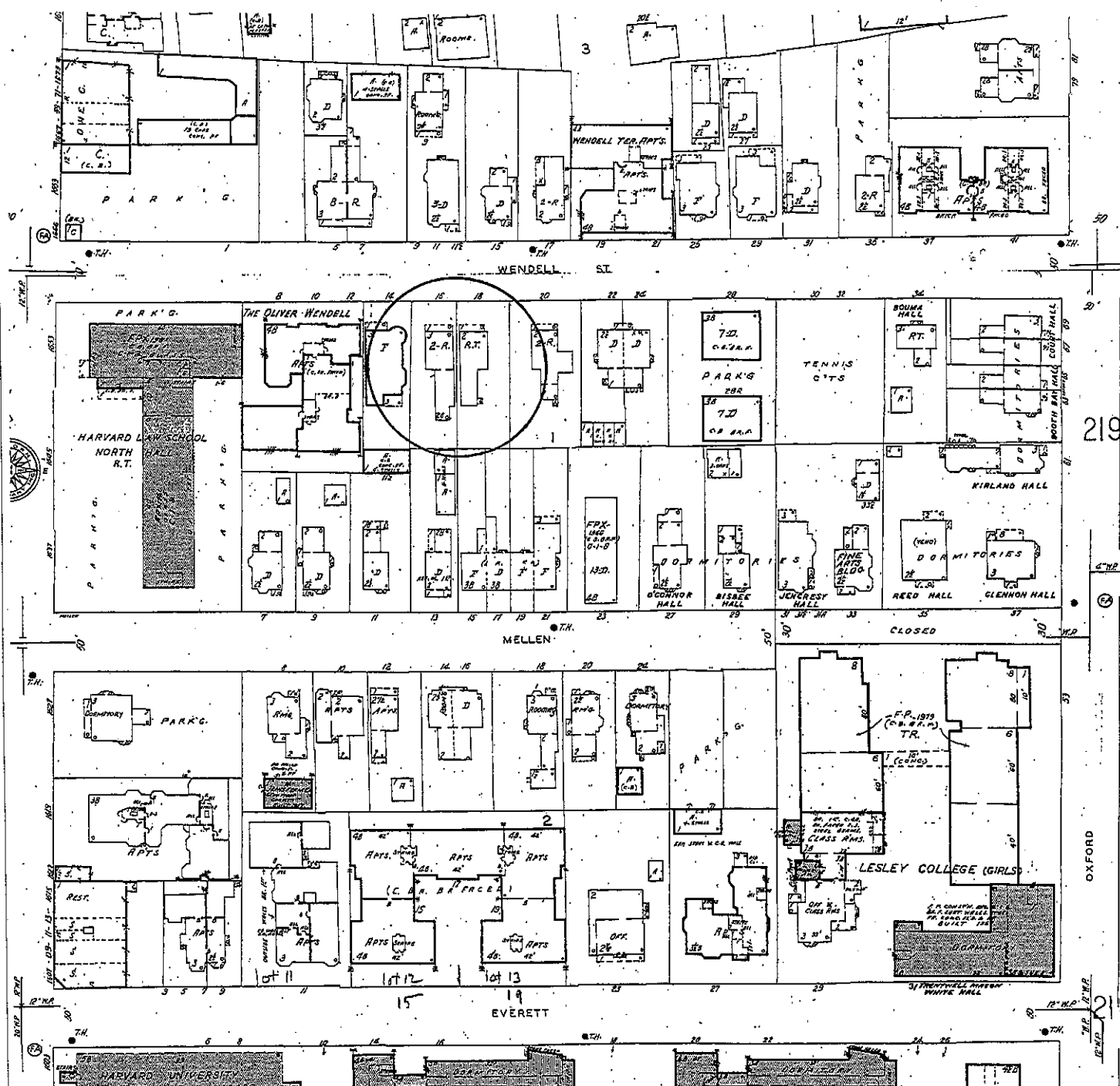
In 1957 Lesley began to redevelop its campus with the construction of Trentwell Mason White Hall, and in 1971 it demolished seven houses and closed one end

of Mellen Street to build an "urban academic village" consisting of two brick and concrete dormitory and classroom buildings. These were intended to form the core of an expanded modern campus, but neighborhood opposition and financial constraints halted the project. In the 1980s, Lesley began to develop a new architectural identity by restoring its collection of almost fifty neglected 19th-century houses and painting them in distinctive but historically appropriate colors.

Lesley College became a university in 2000, when it began to offer multiple doctorate programs. The undergraduate college for women serves about 550 students on the main campus in Cambridge, while most graduate programs are located in the former Sears, Roebuck & Co. building in Porter Square, which Lesley purchased in 1994.

Significance and Recommendation

The houses at 16 and 18 Wendell Street are significant for their architecture as characteristic examples of vernacular Italianate houses of the second half of the nineteenth century that importantly contribute to the streetscape and the collection of Victorian period houses assembled by Lesley University for its residential-scale campus. The associations with the Hubbard, Oliver, and Derby subdivision of the Wendell Estate demonstrate the buildings' significance to the broad architectural, economic and social history of Cambridge. For these reasons, the staff recommends that the houses be found significant, as defined in Chapter 2.78 of the Municipal Code. It is the staff recommendation that the Commission hear testimony from the applicant and members of the public and carefully review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.



Case D-1102-1103: 16 & 18 Wendell Street

The Sanborn Map Company, 2002